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ABSTRACT

This report describes challenges facing the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Louisiana, highlighting teacher turnover and teacher preparation and support. Findings are based on national, state, and local studies that investigated the status of teachers and teaching in the community (preparation, recruitment, retention, certification, satisfaction, and support). Data collection involved surveys of new teachers and teachers who had left the system and discussions with teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community members. Overall, stakeholders believed that teachers should: display strong subject matter knowledge; use creative approaches to teaching; adapt instructional strategies to meet diverse students' needs; possess high expectations of students; and show respect for and enthusiasm to work with students. There was a high teacher turnover rate in the district. A low number of former teachers considered their professional development effective. Results highlighted three areas that should be addressed promptly: develop and implement and effective data system linking student information to teacher information; provide comprehensive professional development that responds to teacher needs and is aligned with school system goals for improving achievement; and make education a responsibility shared by all. (SM)

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Teaching Matters

Promoting Quality Instruction in East Baton Rouge Parish

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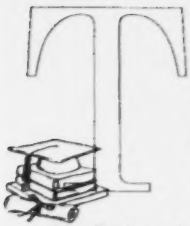

Teaching Matters: Promoting Quality Instruction in East Baton Rouge Parish is the first of a series of occasional papers on important educational issues that affect our community. It has been developed, with significant cooperation and input from other organizations, by the Academic Distinction Fund (ADF), which works to promote excellence in education in Baton Rouge. We are focusing this initial analysis on teachers because research supports what our experience tells us—quality teaching is the critical factor in student success. This report seeks to provide key facts, dispel some myths and make a few suggestions that will involve all of us in improving teaching and learning in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System.

The findings in this report are based on national, state and local data, including information surfaced by ADF and its partners in the research process, SSA Consultants and the Public Affairs Research Council (PAR). The three organizations—ADF, SSA and PAR—conducted extensive research into the status of teachers and teaching in the community. Among the issues that were investigated were preparation, recruitment, retention, certification, satisfaction and support. Their effort began with surveys of new teachers and of those who had left the system, and included discussions with teachers and administrators from 14 schools as well as parents, students and community members to help identify the characteristics of successful teachers. In addition, peer-identified successful teachers from the 14 schools were interviewed.

While this research was underway, ADF engaged, through several strategies, the broader East Baton Rouge community to surface and better understand the public's perceptions and concerns about teaching and public education. In 2001, ADF held seven community conversations, attended by over 100 citizens including teachers and representatives of numerous local and state organizations. In these meetings, citizens wrestled with such questions as what constitutes quality education and discussed and debated such concerns as family support, youth development and meaningful adult participation in public education. In every discussion, the importance of teacher quality was highlighted.

The community conversations informed more extensive discussions on education in East Baton Rouge Parish. These included meetings between elected officials and their constituents, dialogue among students and conversations held by business persons. These and other interactions, including a broadly disseminated survey, ensured that there was significant input from different groups of citizens into the discussions—observers commented on the active participations of organizations and individuals who had not previously been involved in community considerations of education.

The East Baton Rouge Parish School System cooperated throughout the process. The district shared baseline data for each school. The data included, among other things, information on standardized test scores, teachers, program offerings and drop-out rates.

Research and information gathering are fundamental in our efforts to provide facts about education. For almost half a century, schools have been a battleground in our community. Citizens have been distracted from considering the real issues of what it takes to improve student achievement and foster academic excellence for all students and, too often, their beliefs have been shaped by rumor and emotion. Setting forth the facts and making recommendations based on these facts is an essential part of ADF's ongoing efforts to promote informed discussion by concerned citizens.

This discussion—and action arising out of it—is crucial if we are to move ahead. The quality of education is central to the health of a community. If we are going to develop, attract and keep the educated workforce that we need in order to thrive in a knowledge-based economy, we must renew our commitment to excellence in education for all of our students. Quality teaching is at the core of this commitment and fostering quality teaching is not only the job of educators, it is the responsibility of all of us who live and work in Baton Rouge. The recommendations that we make reflect this awareness.

Kevin R. Lyle
Chair
Academic Distinction Fund

Jan A. Melton
Executive Director
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August 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements iv

About the Academic Distinction Fund v

Teachers and Teaching: A Map for East Baton Rouge Parish 1

Louisiana: The State Context 2

East Baton Rouge Parish: The Community Context 2

Starting the Journey: EBRPSS Today 4

EBRPSS Frontline: Teachers 5

Teacher Turnover 5

Teacher Experience 7

Teacher Preparation 7

A New Beginning: Teacher Recruitment 8

A New Beginning: Teacher Support 9

A New Beginning: Teacher Development 10

Student Poverty in EBRPSS 12

Recommendations 13

Conclusion: ADF's Commitment 14

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We also want to recognize a number of individuals and organizations who worked closely with ADF in convening various meetings, conversations, interviews and focus groups and who were themselves in many instances active participants in these events. They include:

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Broadmoor Methodist Church
Capitol High School
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Linda Diefendorf, SSA, Inc.
Dufroq Elementary
Dr. Barbara S. Furhmann, Dean, College of Education, Louisiana State University
Judy P. Foust, Certified Court Reporter
Mike Futrell, State Representative
Glen Oaks Park Elementary
Greenbrier Elementary
Greenville Elementary
Melanie A. Guste, RSCG, Consultant
Ethel Harris, Casey Foundation
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Willie Johnson, Greater Baton Rouge Chamber
Rev. Jennifer Jones, Working Interfaith Network
Ty Keller, PAR
Bette Levine, Community Activist
Sandra Loy, First Methodist Church
Jimmy Lyle, Greater Baton Rouge Chamber
Libby Mixon, Greater Baton Rouge Chamber
Ricard Omdahl, PAR
Darrell Ourso, EBRP Metro Council
Park Elementary
Craig Pourciau, SSA, Inc.
Prescott Middle School
Progress Elementary
Ayan Rubin, Community Activist
Shelby and Company
Shenandoah Elementary
John Smith, 100 Black Men
Southeast Middle
Dr. Ivory Toldson, Dean
College of Education, Southern University
Tara High School
Westdale Middle
Jeff Wright, Graham Group

In this work we were grateful for the cooperation of other organizations that lent expertise, gave encouragement and provided advice. Special thanks go to our primary research partners, the Public Affairs Research Council and SSA, Inc. Other collaborators include the Greater Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce, the Citizens Task Force and the Office of the Mayor.

We want to also single out Claire Handley, of Kronley & Associates, an Atlanta-based consulting firm that has worked extensively with ADF over the years. Ms. Handley drew on her knowledge of education and her familiarity with research and best practices in teaching to advise us on content and format and to develop the report.

Finally, and of greatest significance, we want to thank the East Baton Rouge Parish School System and its Superintendent, Clayton Wilcox. EBRPSS cooperated fully with this effort; this collaboration reflects its emphasis on strong teaching to foster better learning. As this report finds, there are promising trends in our school system. It is our greatest hope that this analysis will help further these developments by providing the schools and the community with information and ideas that will enable them to move forward together to promote quality teaching.

About the Academic Distinction Fund

The Academic Distinction Fund (ADF) works to raise and to invest private sector funds to promote innovations that will lead to academic excellence for students in the East Baton Rouge Parish Public Schools. In providing this private sector leadership, the Fund promotes best practices in education, supports teachers in their work and their professional growth, and encourages schools and the community to foster improved teaching and learning.

ADF was established in 1989 by concerned citizens in East Baton Rouge who recognized that quality public education is central to the success of the community. Since its founding, ADF has dedicated itself to promoting effective teaching and better learning. It has provided grants to individual teachers and teams of teachers to promote the development of and share innovative learning experiences for students. It has, through an intensive fellowship program and networking opportunities, supported the professional growth of teachers. Through a substantial grant program, ADF has also encouraged school leaders and faculties to craft and implement thoughtful and coordinated activities to address pressing academic needs among their students.

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Teachers and Teaching: A Map for East Baton Rouge Parish School System

What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn. Recruiting, preparing and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools.— .

What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future
National Commission on Teaching and America's Future

This report presents a snapshot of some of the challenges confronting the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. The key to addressing those challenges effectively is teachers. Good teaching leads to successful learning.[1]

Two issues that are highlighted in this report—teacher turnover and teacher preparation and support—are critical in creating a cadre of excellent teachers in EBRPSS. As the report describes, the school system has already begun implementing innovative strategies to recruit new teachers and strengthen the pool of teacher candidates. One school, through much hard work and creativity, has crafted and implemented effective professional development strategies that can serve as a dynamic model for the entire system. At its close, the report lays out three recommendations to build on these positive developments and help ensure that every teacher is effective and that every student is engaged in meaningful learning.

Louisiana: The State Context

The key ingredients for a vibrant 21st Century economy in Louisiana will be a skilled and educated workforce, access to technology and access to capital.[2]

East Baton Rouge Parish and Louisiana have many similarities. Each faces significant challenges but both have begun to lay a foundation for transformative change that will help every student reach high levels of learning.

The state's actions have been driven by an increasing awareness of the close connection between improving Louisiana's system of public education and adapting to a new economy. Louisiana's economy—like that of the region and the nation—is changing. Once primarily dependent on natural resources or heavy industry, it is shifting to one that values knowledge and complex skills. The plentiful jobs of the past that required often arduous physical labor but little formal education are being replaced by ones that demand critical thinking and analytical skills—skills that can only be gained through comprehensive and rigorous education.

Louisiana, recognizing and assessing the challenges it confronts in adapting to this evolving economy, has begun to take steps to ensure that its students will possess those critical skills.

[1]Defining "good teaching" concisely is not easy. The federal "No Child Left Behind" Act of 2001 calls for a well-prepared teacher in every classroom and defines a well-prepared teacher as one who "knows what to teach, how to teach and has command of the subject matter being taught." (www.nochildleftbehind.gov/start/facts/teachers.html) The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future calls for a caring, competent and qualified teacher in every classroom. (*NCTAF, What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. 1996) Louisiana Governor Mike Foster joined with the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in calling for a "trained and qualified teacher in every classroom," and launching the Teacher Quality Initiative. The common thread through these and other descriptions is a teacher who has in-depth content knowledge, extensive understanding of and skill in instructional approaches and a strong commitment to helping students achieve at high levels.

[2]Louisiana: Vision 2020, Louisiana Department of Economic Development. www.lded.state.la.us/new/vision2020/overview.htm

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Louisiana: The State Context

Challenges

Louisiana's students trail their peers across the nation on indicators of educational achievement including the National Assessment of Educational Progress.[3] (see chart below)

Signs of Progress

Louisiana has launched a well-regarded effort, the Teacher Quality Initiative, to improve teaching across the state by more effectively recruiting, preparing, supporting and retaining teachers. The product of a Blue Ribbon Commission established by the Louisiana Board of Regents and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Initiative, among other things, offers increased incentives for teachers to gain certification from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, requires revised teacher preparation curricula across state universities that will place greater emphasis on content, strengthens certification requirements, and provides greater support to first-year teachers through several mechanisms including a comprehensive mentoring program.

East Baton Rouge Parish: The Community Context

East Baton Rouge Parish faces the same fundamental challenge as the state does—adapting to a knowledge-based economy. While the Capital Region—East Baton Rouge Parish and its neighboring parishes[5] —leads other regions of the state in many areas, it has not kept pace with its peer metropolitan areas across the country such as Nashville, Austin, Raleigh-Durham, Birmingham or Denver.

The region has not diversified its economy and remains dependent on two sectors – government and energy/petrochemicals. Lack of diversification has had consequences that affect all of us. Job growth here has lagged behind and unemployment surpassed that of our peer metropolitan areas—companies are not merely seeking available workers, they are seeking talented workers. Communities like ours, which have limited numbers of talented workers, struggle to attract new investments. In part, one result is the poverty rate in East Baton Rouge is higher than in comparable cities and average salary far lower[6]. The first and most important step we must take

Student Achievement
Percent scoring at or above proficient[4]

	4th grade NAEP math (2000)	8th grade NAEP math (2000)	4th grade NAEP science (2000)	8th grade NAEP science (2000)	4th grade NAEP reading (1998)	8th grade NAEP reading (1998)	8th grade NAEP writing (1998)
Louisiana	14	12	19	18	19	18	12
U.S.	25	26	28	30	29	31	24

[3]The National Assessment of Educational Progress exam (NAEP), known as the Nation's Report Card, is "the only nationally representative, continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas." (National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.) NAEP has been administered since 1969 and seeks to measure student learning and gauge their progress over time.
[4]Quality Counts 2002: Building Blocks for Success: Education Week. January 10, 2002
[5]The Greater Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce identifies the Capital Region as being comprised of the following parishes: Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, West Baton Rouge, and West Feliciana. (ICF Consulting, Capital Region Competitive Strategy Executive Summary, May 2002.)
[6]ICF Consulting, *Capital Region Competitive Strategy Executive Summary*, May 2002

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to begin addressing these issues is improving our school system. It is the foundation of our economic future and financial well-being.

Effectively supporting the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, and helping its teachers and leaders to prepare our students for a knowledge-based economy will not be easy. The decades-old lawsuit to desegregate the system has generated considerable tension across the community that has been difficult to dispel. Many people hold assumptions about our schools and school system that are no longer true, which may prevent them from becoming active supporters of public education. The school system itself has been slow to gather, analyze and share information that will help demonstrate to the community the real progress it has made and its increased recognition of citizens' concerns.

These issues, however, should no longer distract us from the critical task at hand—building a system of public education where every teacher has the skills and knowledge he or she needs to help every student excel. Our future, no less than that of the students themselves, rests on our willingness to do so.

Starting the Journey: East Baton Rouge Parish School System Today

Our schools comprise the second largest school district in Louisiana. We have large schools and small schools and schools that are urban, suburban and rural. Many of the schools have attributes that are found in schools in large districts across the country —high poverty, lack of resources, disengaged parents and uninterested community members. In part because of these attributes, our school system confronts many difficult issues, including low test scores, high drop-out rates and low graduation rates. It also, however, has many strengths, including, most critically, innovative leadership, a core of dedicated teachers and a critical mass of community and business organizations that, through creativity, commitment and energy, can spur and support change across East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS).

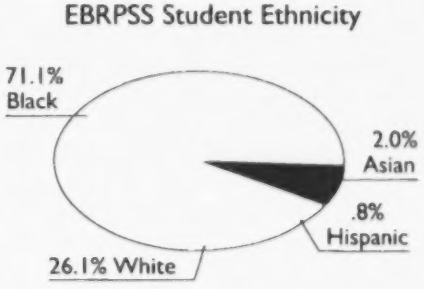
EBRPSS: A Snapshot

Number of Students[7]: 54,246

Number of Teachers[8]: 3,902

Number of Schools[9]: 105

Student Ethnicity[10]:



[7]2000-2001 Louisiana District Accountability Data File (available at http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/pdfs/sps2001/DARC/DAS2000File_1.xls)
[8]Summary of Reported Personnel (October 2, 2000) (available at http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/omf/formsDPair/Staff00.xlw). EBRPSS had 3,750 classroom teachers and an additional 145 professionals in its instructional programs, 369 instructional support professionals (librarians, counselors, staff instructors, etc.) and 177 professionals in support services (principals, assistant principals, etc.)
[9]64 elementary schools, 3 charters, 17 middle schools, 6 alternative and 15 high schools. EBRPSS, Office of Instruction
[10]"Multiple Statistics for Total Reported Public School Students—October 2001, Source: SIS Report as of 1-Oct-2001" Louisiana Department of Education

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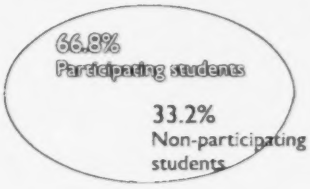
Starting the Journey: East Baton Rouge Parish School System Today

Student Economic Status[1]*:*

Percent of Students who Participate in Free & Reduced Lunch Program



Achievement in EBRPSS Schools

The chart below, which indicates the percent of EBRPSS schools that are in each of Louisiana's categories of school achievement, makes clear why assisting our schools must be our first priority.

Trends, however, are more positive. As the second chart below reveals, EBRPSS has already begun the hard work of getting all of our students to high levels of learning.

Achievement Among EBRPSS Students

The results of the Spring 2001 LEAP and GEE exams show that the struggles of our schools are a reflection of the struggles of our students. At each grade level tested, 40 percent or more of students did not reach the level of "basic" competence and

Where Our Schools Are

	School of Academic Excellence	School of Academic Distinction	School of Academic Achievement	Academically Above the State Average	Academically Below the State Average	Academically Unacceptable
EBR	1.0	0.0	10.3	20.6	64.9	3.1
Louisiana	0.3	1.1	14.7	32.9	48.2	2.8

How Far Our Schools Have Come

	Exemplary Academic Growth	Recognized Academic Growth	Minimal Academic Growth	No Growth	School in Decline	No Label Assigned
EBR	45.7	22.2	18.5	6.2	2.5	4.9
Louisiana	43.9	25.5	18.6	4.7	1.4	5.8

[1]As of November 2001 as reported by EBRPSS. The Louisiana Department of Education estimates that in the 2002-03 school year, 73 percent of EBRPSS will qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.

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readiness in reading to proceed to the next level of schooling. In math, the percentage of students who did not attain the "basic" level was higher—more than 50 percent at each grade level[12]. (see chart below)

EBRPSS Frontline: Teachers

Teachers are the leaders of our effort to respond effectively to EBRPSS's challenges and to ensure that every student in our schools learns to high levels.

Teachers and teaching matter. As the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) stated, as the research has proved and as any classroom visitor can readily see, teacher quality is the most influential factor in a student's success. Two issues that have a significant effect on the quality of our teaching force are the system's high teacher turnover rate and its ensuing over-reliance on inexperienced and uncertified teachers.

If EBRPSS and our students are to fulfill their potential for excellence, we must build on current recruitment and retention policies and practices to reduce teacher turnover and ensure the teachers, at each stage of their careers, are adequately prepared and supported.

Teacher Turnover

EBRPSS has a high teacher turnover rate, which means that there is a steady flow of teachers into and out of our schools. With our high turnover rate, every year we have many teachers who must spend considerable time learning the policies and practices of EBRPSS and establishing productive relationships with colleagues and principals as well as with students, their families and the larger communities that the schools serve.

Spring 2001 LEAP & GEE Results
Percent of Students at Each Level[12]

Grade 4	*English*					*Math*				
	A	P	B	AB	U	A	P	B	AB	U
	1	13	42	26	17	2	10	38	25	26
Grade 8	*English*					*Math*				
	A	P	B	AB	U	A	P	B	AB	U
	1	10	33	39	17	2	2	30	27	39
Grade 10	*English*					*Math*				
	A	P	B	AB	U	A	P	B	AB	U
	1	15	41	23	20	5	14	28	14	38

[12]The Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) and the Graduation Exit Examination (GEE) measure how well a student has mastered the state's content standards, ensuring that students are adequately prepared to advance to the next grade level or to graduate from high school. (Louisiana Department of Education)
A=Advanced: Student has demonstrated superior performance beyond the proficient level of mastery.
P=Proficient: Student has demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter and is well prepared for the next level of schooling.
B=Basic: Student has demonstrated only the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling
AB=Approaching Basic: Student has only partially demonstrated the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling.
U=Unsatisfactory: Student has not demonstrated the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for the next level of schooling.

According to data compiled by EBRPSS:

• The annual teacher turnover rate is 15 percent: Approximately 400 new teachers are hired each fall and 200-300 more are hired throughout the school year.

• In 2000, EBRPSS defined its teacher shortage as critical, particularly in the following areas:

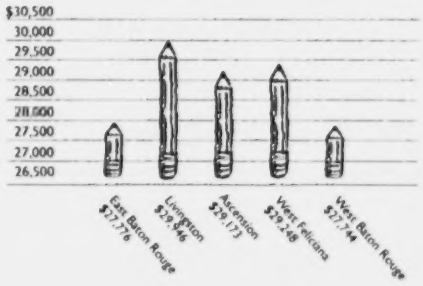
Special education
Foreign languages
Math
Science

Mobility among teachers within EBRPSS is also high. During the 2000-01 school year, 628 teachers—approximately 16 percent of all teachers—were reassigned. Before the end of the 2001-02 year, almost 800 teachers were reassigned. While these teachers may be accustomed to EBRPSS policies and practices, with every reassignment, they must devote time and energy to learning their new schools' specific practices and culture and to building relationships with their new colleagues and students.

EBRPSS is not unique in its teacher turnover rate. Across Louisiana, teachers, especially new teachers, leave the profession at high rates. According to a recent study[13], 30 percent of all new teachers in the state will leave teaching within five years. Money—or the lack of it—is one reason many teachers leave. The study's findings on the importance of money in retaining teachers were confirmed by an ADF survey of former EBRPSS teachers. According to the survey, better pay was one of the top three reasons our teachers left EBRPSS.

Money also matters in recruiting teachers. With its low starting salary, EBRPSS faces a considerable hurdle in its competition with neighboring parishes for the best qualified new teachers[14]. New teachers in Livingston Parish earn over $2,000 more than new teachers in East Baton Rouge Parish.

Teacher Starting Salaries



ADF's survey of former EBRPSS teachers revealed other reasons teachers have left our community. Among the most frequently cited reasons are:

- Student disciplinary problems
- High principal turnover
- Little or no parental or community involvement
- Lack of guidance and support from school and central office administrators in multiple areas

While there may not be "quick fixes" to these problems, they are—all of them—solvable if the community works together to deal with them.

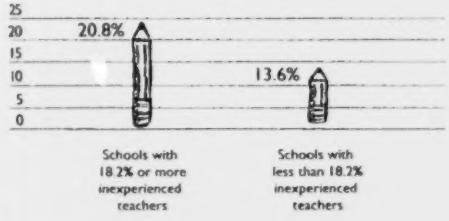
[13]*The Essential Profession: Improving Teacher Quality in Louisiana*, 2001. Council for a Better Louisiana
[14]The starting salary for a new teacher with a bachelor's degree and no experience in EBRPSS is $27,776. Starting salary in Livingston Parish is $29,946, in West Feliciana, it is $29,248, and in Ascension Parish it is $29,173 and in West Baton Rouge it is $27,744.

Teacher Experience

In part as a result of high teacher turnover, a significant proportion of our teachers are inexperienced. In 2000, almost 20 percent of all EBRPSS teachers had three or fewer years of experience. At every level of the system, teacher experience matters. Students with more experienced teachers do better—as measured by their scores on standardized exams—than their peers with less experienced teachers.

• Across EBRPSS elementary schools, 18.2 percent of teachers had three or fewer years experience. In schools with a higher percentage of inexperienced teachers, fourth grade students were more likely to score "unsatisfactory" on the English Language and Arts (ELA) exam than their peers at schools with more experienced teachers.

Percent of 4th Graders Scoring "Unsatisfactory" by Teacher Experience



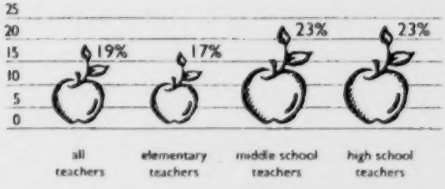
• Almost 23 percent of all middle school teachers have three or fewer years of experience. In middle schools where 23 percent or more teachers were inexperienced, 19.2 percent of eighth graders scored "unsatisfactory" on the eighth grade ELA exam in 2001; only 12.8 percent of eighth graders in schools with fewer (less than 23 percent) of inexperienced teachers did so.

• Teacher experience is equally important in high school. Across EBRPSS high schools, 19.2 percent of teachers have three or fewer years experience. In schools in which 20 percent or more of teachers were inexperienced, an average of 26.8 percent of tenth graders scored "unsatisfactory" on the Grade 10 ELA exam in 2001. Significantly fewer tenth graders—15.8 percent—in schools with greater proportions of experienced teachers scored similarly poorly.

Teacher Preparation

Just as our high teacher turnover rate leaves EBRPSS more dependent on inexperienced teachers, it also leaves our schools more reliant on less prepared teachers, which has consequences for student achievement. Students with more fully prepared teachers –teachers who have gained certification – do better than their peers with less prepared teachers – teachers without certification.

Percent of Uncertified Teachers—2000



In 2000, EBRPSS hired 448 uncertified teachers, representing 11 percent of all teachers[15].

While uncertified teachers may be as dedicated to their students as certified teachers, they have not developed the skills or gained the knowledge that certified teachers did during their training.

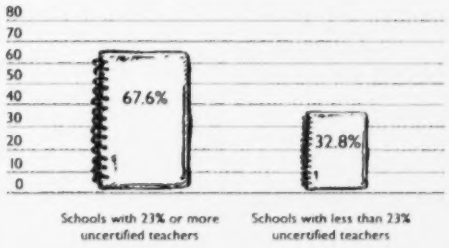
Students in schools with no or few uncertified teachers attain higher levels of achievement than their peers in schools with significant numbers of uncertified teachers.

• At elementary schools in which 17 percent (average proportion of uncertified elementary school teachers) or more of teachers were uncertified, almost 54 percent of fourth grade students scored below basic on the 2001 Spring LEAP English Language Arts exam. At elementary schools where less than 17 percent of teachers were uncertified, students did better—an average of 34 percent of fourth graders at these scored below basic on the ELA exam.

• The lack of certification among teachers appears to have much less influence at the middle school level. At middle schools in which 23 percent (average proportion of uncertified middle school teachers) or more of teachers were uncertified, approximately 57 percent of eighth grade students scored below basic on the 2001 Spring LEAP ELA exam. At those schools in which less than 23 percent of teachers were uncertified, about 50 percent of eighth graders scored below basic[16].

• Lack of certification may have the greatest effect at the high school level. Across the high schools in which 23 percent (average proportion of uncertified high school teachers) or more of teachers were uncertified, 68 percent of tenth grade students scored below basic on the Spring 2001 GEE 21 ELA exam. Across high schools in which less than 23 percent of teachers were uncertified, students fared better—approximately 33 percent scored below basic.

Percent of 10th Graders Scoring Below Basic on Spring 2001 GEE ELA Exam



A New Beginning: Teacher Recruitment

EBRPSS has begun to address teacher turnover and its consequence through an innovative partnership it has developed with The New Teachers Project (TNTP). TNTP and EBRPSS central office staff have worked collaboratively to strengthen the system's existing recruitment process and to develop a new pool of potential teachers.

Enhancing Recruitment

TNTP and EBRPSS first analyzed existing recruiting practices and then crafted a strategic plan through which the system would more effectively target and communicate with graduates from the state's "top-tier"

[15]Data from The New Teacher Project

[16]As of this writing, Louisiana does not require a certification in middle grades. Therefore most middle grade teachers are certified for elementary schools and may not have specialized knowledge in subject areas, unlike high school teachers, or in the specific needs of young adolescents. This may be why the lack of certification does not appear to have the influence among middle school students that it does among elementary and high school students.

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schools of education. Plan components include: a refined recruitment message and supporting materials based on teacher feedback; teacher teams of part-time recruiters; new selection model and interview tools; an up-to-date hiring timeline; and a streamlined application process. In its first year of implementation, the 2000-01 school year, the plan brought results. Among other things, EBRPSS human resource staff:

- Attended 15 recruitment events
- Participated in 11 campus recruitment events
- Conducted first-round interviews with over 300 graduating students by May; the previous year, the system had not conducted any interviews before May 1st.

New Teacher Pool

EBRPSS understands that, in addition to a more effective recruiting process, building a high-quality teaching force also requires tapping new human resources. Relying solely on universities' schools of education to meet our needs is not enough. In response to this, EBRPSS and TNTP have developed Teach Baton Rouge (TBR).

TBR is a year-long, rigorous alternative certification program for selected professionals from other fields. Following a competitive selection process, successful applicants attend a six-week summer institute that incorporates workshops and seminars along with extensive observation and practice under the supervision of experienced faculty. After the institute, participants assume full-time teaching positions. During their first year of practice, the new teachers receive extensive support and guidance through mentoring, regular content seminars with peers, independent activities that arise out of the seminars, and ongoing professional development opportunities.

In its inaugural year, TBR has surpassed expectations. Almost 240 people applied and 29 were selected to attend the summer institute. Twenty-five continued the program and are teaching in EBRPSS while pursuing alternative certification from the state. Of the current cohort:

- 28 percent are teaching in math and science
- Their average GPA is 3.0
- 50 percent are non-white, better reflecting the racial composition of EBRPSS
- 40 percent hold advanced degrees

Expectations for TBR's future are also high. Approximately 500 people applied for the second cohort, which will begin the summer of 2002; about 50 will be selected to participate.

A New Beginning: Teacher Support

According to ADF's teacher survey, 75 percent of former EBRPSS teachers were encouraged to pursue professional development activities. Only 37 percent of them, however, report that the professional development provided by their schools was effective.

Supporting our teachers—both new and experienced ones—in developing their content knowledge and pedagogical skills is critical to retaining them and to helping ensure that every student has a teacher who can help him reach high levels of learning.

New teachers face many challenges. Among

other things, they are learning classroom management strategies, becoming familiar with state and district curriculum and performance standards, mastering—through trial and error—teaching strategies that support standards, and often developing classroom curricula that align with standards. In most instances, new teachers do these things in isolation and with few readily accessible resources.

Experienced teachers, too, need assistance. Louisiana has developed rigorous performance standards and a comprehensive accountability system. Every student, regardless of family income, race, geographic locale or any other attribute, is expected to reach high levels of achievement. Helping all of our students reach these levels requires every teacher, even those with 20 years in the classroom, to develop deep content knowledge and a broad array of effective instructional strategies.

Over two decades of research on professional development has shown that effective professional development—learning experiences that lead to improved teacher practice and greater student learning—has certain characteristics. Among other things, effective professional development:

- offers collaborative learning experiences
- provides multiple contacts that allow for trial of and feedback on new techniques
- has content that is based in teachers' questions and concerns
- occurs over an extended period
- adheres to a philosophy of continuous learning
- aligns with the district's reform efforts
- incorporates theories of adult learning[17]

In creating professional development experiences, EBRPSS should consider how these research-based elements of effective professional development fit into its reform plans.

A New Beginning:
Teacher Development

One School in EBRPSS:
Polk Elementary School's Model

Change is not easy. Seeking new knowledge and developing new skills can be intimidating. Yet for school leaders and teachers at Polk Elementary School, the greater risk was in not seeking new knowledge or developing new skills. The greatest risk was to continuing doing what they had been doing for years—a pattern that resulted in little success for students. In 1999, 43 percent of fourth graders at Polk scored "unsatisfactory" on the LEAP English Language Arts exam; 63 percent scored "unsatisfactory" on the math exam. The future of Polk and its students seemed bleak.

School leaders understood that the only way to improve student achievement was to transform teaching methods and techniques. A coordinated, research-based effort was launched to provide on-going, job-embedded professional development in two areas—literacy and math[18].

Literacy

Polk established a comprehensive reading improvement program for kindergarten through third grade. Through the program, Polk hired three trained reading recovery teachers (RRTs) to provide direct instruction for students and job-embedded staff

[17]Kronley, R., C. Handley. *Framing the Field: Professional Development in Context*. The Finance Project. Washington DC. June 2001
[18]The professional development in undertaken in both areas were funded by federal grants—a Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant and a local reading grant via the Reading Excellence Act.

development. Each RRT spends half her day working one-on-one with students at risk for failure. During the remainder of the day, the RRTs work with teachers in their classrooms to implement a balanced literacy approach. This support includes modeling effective teaching strategies, observing, providing feedback and assisting with planning.

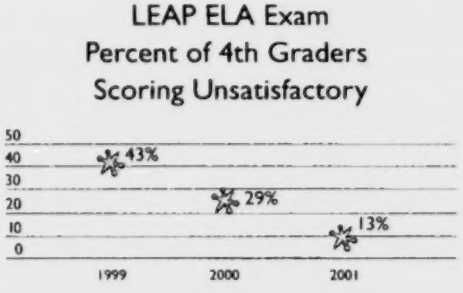
Math

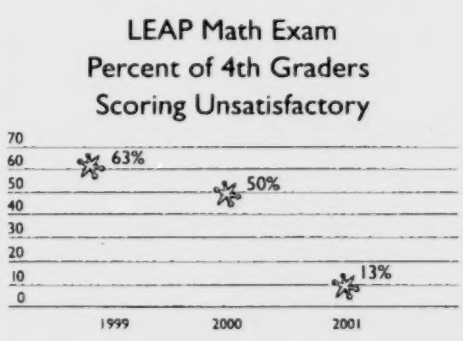
Polk hired two math specialists; one specialist focuses on kindergarten through second grades while the other works with third through fifth grades. As with the RRTs, the math specialists work collaboratively with teachers in their classrooms.

School leaders have also embraced data as a critical instructional tool. Data from multiple and regular assessments—both classroom and district tests—are used to assess student progress[19]. The test results are viewed through three lenses: grade level, class, and individual student. These assessments are used to highlight areas in which students are struggling, enabling teachers to respond quickly and more effectively to student needs, and to pinpoint areas in which teachers may need additional support.

To enhance both professional development efforts, school leaders instituted and facilitate weekly grade level meetings that focus solely on instruction. The meetings are an opportunity to share information on new instructional strategies, to get feedback and assistance, and to engage in collaborative planning. In addition, Polk's leadership—its principal and teacher for instructional support—spend much of their time in classrooms, assisting and observing teachers and learning about students. In doing so, they are signaling to faculty that improving instruction is their priority and it is an undertaking that they are fully committed to—it is not an exercise for teachers only.

The teachers' willingness to and persistence in change is paying off. Students are making significant gains in both their literacy and their math skills. In each area, the percent of Polk fourth graders who scored "unsatisfactory" on the LEAP exam decreased between 1999 and 2001.





[19]Pre- and post-test data from the Development Reading Assessment and the district's math tests as well as running records administered every nine weeks are uses to assess students' progress.

Polk's success may seem more astonishing given its demographics. Almost 96 percent of Polk's students participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program and virtually all of them are minority. Polk's leaders and teachers have made clear, as little else will so starkly, that while poverty may influence students, it need not limit their learning or define their teachers' expectations of them.

Word of Polk's success has begun to spread. The school has hosted multiple visits from teachers in other districts. Representatives of the Louisiana Department of Education have also visited the school, seeking to learn how Polk's leaders and teachers have begun to transform the school.

While Polk Elementary still has a long way to go—based on 2001 LEAP exams, it has been labeled by the state as "academically below the state average"—it has made significant strides. The state also designated Polk as a school that showed "exemplary academic growth" as it surpassed its growth target by more than five points.

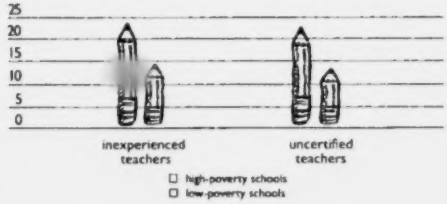
Student Poverty in EBRPSS

Polk's students are not alone in confronting poverty; the majority of EBRPSS students do so—two-thirds of them (66.8 percent) participate in the free and reduced lunch (FRL) program. Students from low-income families face significant challenges that their middle- and upper-income peers do not and which, too often, contribute to poor educational outcomes among them. Each year that a child lives in poverty, the probability that he will perform below grade level increases by two percent[20]. Poor students are also twice as likely as non-poor students to be retained[21]. These negative outcomes may be due to things beyond the control of schools and school districts such as inadequate nutrition and poor health, both of which can impede learning and which many low-income students experience[22]. Parental involvement can make a significant difference in a student's academic success. Yet parents of low-income children may be less engaged in their children's school work for a variety of reasons, which include long and non-traditional work hours and a lack of transportation.

Sometimes, however, schools and districts unintentionally contribute to the poor educational outcomes of low-income students. Across the nation, schools that serve predominantly low-income students—students with the greatest educational needs—tend to be staffed by the least experienced and least qualified teachers—teachers least prepared to respond effectively to the students' needs[23]. EBRPSS is part of this trend and being so may influence the academic success of low-income students in the district.

As the chart below reveals, schools where 66.8 percent or more of students participated in the FRL program had more inexperienced teachers and more uncertified teachers than those schools where less than 66.8 percent of students were in the FRL program.

Poverty and Teacher Quality



[20]Louisiana Department of Education. *2000-01 Louisiana State Education Progress Report*. March 2002.
[21]Louisiana Department of Education. *Grade Level Retention in Louisiana Public Schools 1997-98 to 2000-01*. May 2001.
[22]Kronley, R.A. Fighting Poverty, Building Community: A Report on Poverty in Louisiana. Council for a Better Louisiana, 1999. Song, Y., H. Lu Early Childhood Poverty: A Statistical Profile (March 2002). National Center for Children in Poverty. (http://cpmc-net.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/ecp302.html).
[23]National Commission on Teaching & America's Future. *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. New York, New York. September 1996.

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Recommendations

Beyond the extensive research, data collection and analysis undertaken in support of this report, ADF also held a series of focus groups and interviews to gather input from stakeholders across the community to better understand their expectations of teachers as well as the characteristics, skills and knowledge they believe teachers should possess, and to identify strategies to help teachers fulfill these expectations. The stakeholders—parents, students, educators, and representatives of community and business organizations, many of whom had never participated in such a process before—were clear in their expectations of teachers. Among other things, they believe teachers should: display strong subject matter knowledge; use creative approaches to teaching; adapt instructional strategies to meet diverse student needs; possess high expectations of students; and show respect for and enthusiasm to work with students.

Drawing on our research and on the outcomes of the focus groups, we have identified three critical areas that we believe must be addressed promptly to build on the promising work underway in EBRPSS and to best meet the needs of our students and teachers. These areas are data, effective professional development and community awareness.

To meet these needs, we propose the following recommendations.

1. *Develop and implement an effective data system for EBRPSS that links student information to teacher information.*

Accessible, reliable and usable data is a powerful tool for improving teaching and learning. Using it, teachers can quickly identify knowledge and skills that students are struggling to master and alter their teaching strategies to best meet students' needs. Strategic use of data can also help teachers and their principals pinpoint areas where teachers need support so that professional development is better targeted and more effective.

2. *Provide comprehensive and effective professional development that responds to teachers' needs and is aligned with EBRPSS goals for improving student achievement.*

The experience of Polk Elementary School is a compelling model for how research-based, job-embedded professional development can strengthen teaching and improve learning. EBRPSS should draw upon Polk's example to create similar learning experiences for all of our teachers, particularly teachers who work with children at-risk for poor academic performance.

3. *Make education a responsibility we all share. Improving public education in East Baton Rouge over the long-term is not only the responsibility of the school system; it concerns all of us. We—the community—must be active supporters of and advocates for our schools.*

Improving teaching and learning across East Baton Rouge Parish School System, not merely in individual schools, is a complex and time-consuming endeavor that requires not only the resources of the system but also those of the entire parish community. Our community is rich with resources from universities and colleges to businesses to non-profit and social service agencies. We must, through coordinated collaboration, focus these resources on our schools and align them with the system's goals.

Conclusion: ADF's Commitment

Since its founding in 1989, the Academic Distinction Fund has worked to promote academic excellence for all students in East Baton Rouge Parish School System by supporting teacher development, innovation and creativity through a variety of strategies, most prominently teacher and school grants. In the past thirteen years, we have invested $1.6 million in our teachers and our schools. Our commitment to students and teachers will remain steadfast as we confront the continuing challenge of transforming our schools and school system so that they support academic excellence for all students and prepare them to participate fully in the evolving knowledge-based economy.

We believe that this transformation requires the active involvement of all community members—businesses, non-profit and social service organizations, parents, faith-based groups, teachers, administrators and all other stakeholders. We at ADF consequently renew our commitment to continuing and building on our work in three areas: supporting teachers; promoting reform; and engaging the community.

Supporting Teachers

• Continuing to provide teachers and schools with the resources—through multiple grant opportunities—to develop new knowledge and skills that will enhance student learning.

• Identifying and responding to the needs of students, teachers and schools at the school level.

Promoting Reform

• Collaborating with the school system to improve teaching and build public confidence in it.

• Promoting and sustaining improved instructional leadership across all schools.

Engaging the Community

• Building public understanding of and responsibility for schools and the school system as well as support for teachers among key constituencies by:
—continuing to convene diverse stakeholders around issues of teacher quality
—collecting and disseminating broadly data on teacher quality and student progress

• Establishing community partnerships to promote qualified and caring teachers through innovative strategies, proposed by community focus groups, which include:
—recruitment initiatives: loan forgiveness programs; tax incentives; recognition programs; and business promotions
—retention initiatives: mentoring programs for new teachers; comprehensive and meaningful professional development opportunities for all EBRPSS teachers; leadership development programs for teachers and administrators; partnerships with universities

We recognize that undertaking these activities will require new skills and new resources of ADF. To that end, we will continue to build our own internal capacity to meet these demands and will, as well, seek out additional local, state and national funds.

15

Change does not necessarily assure progress, but the progress implacably requires change. Education is essential to change, for education creates both new wants and the ability to satisfy them.

—*Henry Steele Commager*

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